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EMBASSY OF THE
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
Buenos Aires

Argentina

December 6, 1978

OFFICIAL - INFORMAL

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Central Intelligence Agency
Langley, Virginia

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Dear

(This was drafted and got buried by current events. As I still see these themes in the Agency's reporting I will send it on.) I am writing to share my own reactions to your office's (recent) overview on Argentina which appeared in the Latin American Brief AP LAB 78-130 on August 22. Many of the conclusions of the article are excellent and on target. However, there are others which appear to me out of focus.

What concerns me is that the article is reflective of the intelligence community's current assessment of Argentina. I wish to place a few of my personal thoughts into the mill for your consideration and that of your colleagues. I would appreciate any feedback on these points.

Videla as a Good Guy

"For the past two years President Videla has sought to comply with US requests to improve human rights in Argentina and to accept international restrictions on nuclear development without providing his domestic opponents with an opportunity to exploit deeper rooted popular feelings of nationalism." (Para 1)

"Videla, moreover, is personally comfortable with the general thrust of Washington's human rights policy. He has attempted to reduce repression by Argentina's security services and seems sincerely interested in gradually preparing the way for return to civilian rule." (Para 10)

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GDS 12/6/84 (W. H. Hallman) OR-P

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The characterization of Videla as a "good guy" in comparison with the hardline nationalists in the military is a common theme in any discussions of current Argentine affairs. However, it is important to hold this theme under tight rein. There is no information in the record which shows that Videla is personally comfortable with our human rights policy, nor information that he has done anything more than try to find the minimal human rights concessions to buy off US concern. Videla's peace by Christmas promise made in the U.S. late last year resulted in the naming of the executive detainees and the removal from PEN status of 350 prisoners. Videla, himself, has not to our knowledge taken a personal initiative in the human rights area. He has in fact repeatedly said it was necessary to prosecute those guilty of putting forth "bad ideas".

The fact that there are worse guys within the Argentine military who want a full-scale effort against all Marxists (e.g. the PCA) does not mean that Videla because he opposes this view is trying to improve the human rights situation.

Videla is perhaps better described as a low key political pragmatist, who despite a weak and a declining power base within the military government, is trying to work out acceptable compromises between the contending forces.

To find Videla for OUR requests and personally comfortable with the thrust of OUR policy tends to exaggerate the influence and impact that our efforts have on Argentine domestic politics. The big and almost the only game in town is military politics. Our statements and actions have effect in that game but are small in comparison to such real questions as who will head the First Corps in 1979; who will be appointed governor, etc.

Foreign Policy Redirections

The Montes' opening to the Non-aligned and the East bloc diplomatic is viewed by the media, the Argentine foreign policy establishment and by most Argentine serious observers of foreign policy as amateurism. You emphasized correctly

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that the foreign policy human rights related problems with the US and Western Europe make a political shift in Argentina's foreign policy expedient. What should have received equal emphasis is that this shift parallels Argentina's economic interests. The United States and Western Europe are not markets for Argentine grains, wine, meat and hides (much of it of lower quality); but the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe and China are.

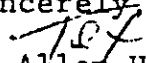
Suggestions that the Argentines are moving towards a new diplomatic opening in the NAM must be balanced by two facts. First, this Argentine government has an anti-Communist paranoia. Secondly, the deep racial prejudices in its own society make Argentine overtures for a leadership role in the Non-Aligned Movement suspect.

The same balancing must be applied to any discussion of stronger political connections between the Argentines and the Communist nations. How deep and cordial can relations be with the Socialist world for a government which declares (and believes that its country is the battleground of the Third World War against Communism.) It is clearly a relationship of mutual convenience overlaying a base of mutual deep and enduring suspicions.

The thrust of your argument that U.S. human rights and nuclear policies stimulated the Argentine move towards the Non-aligned and the East Europeans is only part of the story. My judgment is somewhat less grand. Every Foreign Minister loves initiatives, an opening to the East and to the Non-Aligned are attractive proposals which the agile Argentine Foreign Office can easily crank up for its Navy overlords. Argentine foreign policy is in disastrous straits -- the Beagle, the Falkvinas, Corpus, human rights, and the image issue. The Argentine President and Junta members are greeted during international visits with violent demonstrations. Then, all of a sudden someone produces a blueprint for a way out of the black box with a ticket to Belgrade and Moscow.

I hope the foregoing although dated is of value. At least it shows that we read your stuff with great interest here in Buenos Aires.

Best regards,

Sincerely,

 F. Allen Harris
 First Secretary

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